THE PROPHET OF PEACE AND HUMANITY

By Qutubuddin Aziz

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The Messenger of God

Childhood

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was born on the 20th of April, 571 C.E. in the city of Makkah in Arabia. A distinguished scion of the Hashim clan of the powerful Qureish tribe, his father was Abdullah bin Abdul Muttalib. Alas, he did not live to see the birth of his son who was destined to spread God's message of peace, piety and righteousness on earth. He died a few months before his son was born. Abdullah, a thriving businessman who led trading caravans to Syria from Makkah, was taken ill in the city of Madina where he died and was buried there.

The mother of the infant Prophet-to-be was the pretty and cultured Amina who loved her son. Despite the bereavement inflicted on her at a young age by widowhood, she lookedafterhim with the utmost devotion. His paternal grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, also loved his handsome grandson. In conformity with the prevailing custom in Arabia, his mother appointed the conscientious Halima Saadia to nurse him and she breast-fed him like her own son.

Muhammad was barely six years old when a second tragedy struck him. His mother took him to Madina to visit the grave of his father. On the way back to Makkah she fell ill and died suddenly. His grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, then became his full-time guardian and gave him all the affection

and care which he desperately needed. But hardly two years had passed when he lost his loving grandfather, too, who died at the age of 82. He willed that his son, Abu Talib, should make Muhammad his ward, and he looked after his upbringing and education. In the partly pastrol economy of Makkah, sheep had considerable value and Abu Talib on occasions deputed his 12-year-old nephew to be the shepherd of his flock. He also took him to Syria with a trading caravan. On the way to Syria, a Christian friar saw the young Muhammad and discerned in him the signs of Prophethood. The visit to Syria broadened the horizons of his knowledge of geography and commerce.

Social Service

When war broke out between the tribes of Qureish and Qais, the teenage Prophet-to-be sided with his Uncle but he wielded no sword nor he shed human blood. He gave cheer and hope to the wounded in the battle of Fujair. Subsequently, he joined a band of dedicated young men in founding a social service agency which helped the weak, the destitute and the oppressed. He signed a covenant under which the welfare agency was established and a leading light in it was his Uncle, Abu Talib.

The shrine of Ka'aba in Makkah was renovated but a dispute arose amongst the many tribes of Arabia as to who should place inside it the much-venerated black stone. It was decided that the person who enters Ka'aba with the first light of dawn on the morrow should have the privilege of doing this duty. And, lo, the next morning, the teenage Muhammad was the first to enter the precincts of the Ka'aba. Showing statesmanship at such a young age, he persuaded the Makkans to place the black stone on a large thick sheet

and the leaders of all the tribes joined in lifting it and placing it in to the Ka'aba. A tribal war was thus averted by his wisdom.

Trade

Initiated into trade and commerce by his Uncle, the young Muhammad won fame as a successful, honest and trustworthy trader. His trading missions to Syria and Yemen yielded sizeable profits and those who entrusted him with their money and goods reaped large dividends. His honesty as a trader was so well-known that many Makkans deposited their wealth with him and called him the most reliable trustee or *Amin*. A wealthy widow, Khadijah, sent him on a trading mission to Syria where he sold her merchandise from Makkah at a good profit and returned home with riches, all of which he handed over to her. Deeply impressed by his honesty and his business acumen, forty-year-old Khadijah proposed marriage to the 25-year-old Muhammad, who was also her distant cousin and they were married. He continued his trading missions and saw many more neighbouring countries.

He loved his wife devotedly and their marital relations were blissful. She bore him children including Fatimah whom he adored.

Prophethood

Right from his youthful days, Muhammad detested the hundreds of idols which the Makkans worshipped in the Ka'aba. He abstained from the feasts which they held to honour these 360 stones. He urged them to give up the evil practices which they followed as a part of their idolatrous existence such as nude pilgrimage and bacchanal orgies. To

escape from the din and bustle of the city, he sometimes sought refuge in solitude in the cave of Hira, 3 miles from Makkah. There he meditated on the mysteries of the universe and the destiny of man on earth. His soul yearned for the divine light. On a fateful day, the angel Gabriel appeared before him and asked him to recite the name of the Almighty Allah, the Lord of the Heavens, and the Creator of Earth and all mankind. Shocked by the suddenness and the glory of the divine revelation, the 40-year-old Prophet hurried to his loving wife, Khadijah and told her what had happened in the Cave of Hira. She was convinced that it was an angelic visitation and a command from God that he was henceforth to be His Prophet on earth, entrusted with a divine mission to spread His word to the farthest corners of the globe. Thus a noble housewife and a righteous woman became the first convert to Islam and a believer in the Prophethood of Muhammad.

The angel Gabriel visited the Prophet many a time and revealed to him the word of God in the shape of the holy Qur'an. He shared knowledge of his divine revelation with some of his closest relatives and friends amongst whom were the rich and magnanimous Abu Bakr, the lion-hearted Ali who respected him like a father, the learned Osman, the intrepid Saad Bin Abi Waqas and the Prophet's former slave, Zaid, whom he treated like his own son. They hailed Prophet Muhammad as God's Messenger and joined the fold of Islam.

Encouraged by divine support and the unfailing loyalty and affection of his faithful wife and his companions, the Prophet taught them the verses of the Quran and the Islamic form of prayer. As news of the Islamic religious movement

launched by the Prophet reached the idolatrous rulers of Makkah, they felt alarmed and unleashed persecution on the converts to Islam. They tried to tempt the Prophet with worldly riches to subvert his faith in God but, with rock-like determination, he continued to spread the message of Islam. He showed angelic patience by cheerfully bearing the tortures which the idol-worshipping Makkan rulers inflicted on him and his Muslim followers. They even tried to have him murdered but their evil designs failed. The fraternity of Muslims continued to expand rapidly and it gained in strength when the dynamic Omar and the powerful Hamza joined it by embracing Islam. Many tribes who lived in the neighbourhood of Makkah became Muslim.

Muslims go to Abyssinia

Deeply grieved by the tortures which the Makkan rulers perpetrated on many Muslims, the Prophet persuaded 15 of them, 11 men and four women, to emigrate to Abyssinia where the merciful Negus gave them asylum. He spurned the mounds of gold offered by the emissaries of the Makkan rulers to hand over the Muslim refugees to them. A Christian, the Negus was pleased when the Muslims said in his court that they believed in the Almighty God and his Prophet Muhammad and that they also respected Jesus as a God-sent Prophet and his mother, the Virgin Mary.

For three long and hardship-laden years, the small Muslim community bore the social and economic boycott ordered by the Makkan rulers. But they never wavered in their allegiance to God and their faith in the divine mission of the Prophet grew stronger.

In these testing times, a tragedy befell the Prophet. His

Uncle, Abu Talib, and his wife, Khadijah, passed away. It was an irreparable loss because he loved them dearly. But he showed great fortitude in bearing this loss. He continued his divine mission and preached Islam even in the precincts of the Ka'aba, provoking the wrath and the conspiracies of the Makkan overlords.

The process of Quranic revelation to the Prophet by the angel Gabriel continued. Out of the 23 years of his Prophethood, thirteen years were spent in Makkah and ten in Madina. About two-third of the Quran was revealed to him while he was in Makkah and the divine revelatins were continued in Madina. Before he emigrated to Madina, the Prophet was taken by the angel Gabriel on a journey to the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem from where he ascended to the Heavens, met the Porphets who had preceded him and was ushered into God's presence.

Emigration to Madina

News of the Prophet's inspiring sermons, his piety and his righteous conduct and the nobility of his followers reached the ancient city of Madina (whose pre-Islamic name was Yathrib). Some of the city's elders were Jews who believed that God would send a Prophet again. A group of twelve learned men from Madina called on the Prophet in Makkah and discussed with him the message of Islam. They felt so deeply inspired that they embraced Islam and invited him and his companions to emigrate to Madina and make it their home. The Prophet then gave orders to his followers to proceed to Madina where they were welcomed by its hospitable and cultured inhabitants, the *Ansars*. It was in the 13th year of his Prophetic Mission that the Prophet emigrated to Madina. The journey was daunting and

eventful because the Makkan rulers wanted to assassinate him but God willed otherwise and the Prophet arrived in Madina amid a rousing welcome in 622 C.E. The Islamic Hijri calendar began with the Prophet's historic journey to Madina.

One of his first acts after taking up abode in Madina was to build a mosque there. From it radiated the light of Islam all over the city and beyond. It was the matrix of Islam, the symbol of God's omnipotence and the magnet that drew the nascent Muslim community to pray in it five times a day.

The old inhabitants of Madina welcomed the Prophet and his Muslim followers with open arms and they embraced Islam in vast numbers. The Quran called upon Muslims to treat each other as brothers-in-faith and the Prophet, exhibiting divinely-inspired statesmanship, built such durable bridges of understanding and cooperation that they became an inseparable and trusting brotherhood of Islam. The economy of Madina was largely pastoral but once the Prophet was entrusted by its people with its governance, he promoted trade and commerce which increased the city's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and yielded benefits for the old and new inhabitants alike. Their fraternal Islamic bonds were strengthened by inter-marriages between Madina's Ansars and the Emigrants from Makkah, the Mohajereen.

When the Prophet preached Islam in Makkah, he and his companions turned towards the holy Mosque of Al Aqsa in Jerusalem when they offered their prayers. Eighteen months after his emigration to Madina, in response to a divine command, he ordered the Muslims to turn to the Ka'aba in Makkah at the time of prayer.

Defence of Islamic State

As the wealth and prosperity of Madina grew under the Prophet's stewardship, the Makkan rulers unleashed a barrage of threats and prepared for war. They put pressure on the tribes which lived between Makkah and Madinah to attack the Muslim emigrant community. The Prophet then busied kimself in strengthening the defences of Madina. In the fasting month of Ramzan in the second year of the Hijri era, the Prophet led 313 armed Muslims to the strategic village of Badr on the arterial route from Madina to Syria to face the onslaught of the Makkan army which was planning to invade Islam's new base. In the contingent which followed the Prophet's qualities as an army commander were put to test. Sitting under a small thatched canopy with an arrow in his hand, the Prophet gave commands to his men to blunt the attack of the enemy and prayed to Almighty God for His support.

Ranged against the Muslims were many of Makkah's renowned fighters, some of whom were, indeed, blood relations of the Muslim defenders. In the battle that ensued, the Muslims fought with exemplary valour and routed the Makkan army. The Makkans, who were taken captive, were treated with magnanimity by the Prophet and they were allowed to return to Makkah after their relatives had paid compensation to the Muslims. As the Prophet of Peace and mercy, he rejected the suggestion put forward by the hawks in his camp to put the captives to death as was often the fate of the vanquished in that period of man's history. The Prophet's effort was to avoid war and he went into battle only when the Makkan rulers resorted to aggression against the Islamic city state of Madina.

Seeking revenge for their defeat at Badr, Makkah's pagan rulers again prepared for war and sent a large army to attack Madina. The Prophet's 700 gallant defenders were outnumbered by the Makkan forces in the battle at Uhad and they lost the day despite their acts of epic valour and heroism. Nevertheless, the losses suffered by the enemy were so heavy that they returned to Makkah without capturing even the outworks of Madina.

Courage and Fortitude

The reverses suffered by the Muslim defenders in the battle of Uhud cast gloom in many homes in Madina but the Prophet's leadership was so inspiring and noble that the vast majority of its population remained loyal to Islam and joined him wholeheartedly in strengthening the city's defences against an expected attack from the revanchist Makkans. The Prophet drew up a battle plan for the city's defence and ordered the digging of large ditches around it to ward off the enemy's onslaught. For many days and nights he laboured hard along with his hundreds of followers in digging the ditches. The Makkan army numbering 24,000 laid siege to Madina but because of the ditches and the bravery of the defenders they were unable to undertake a frontal assault. Indeed God was on the side of the Muslims and hurricane-force winds swept away the enemy's camps and the food supply from Makkah was disrupted. Muslim swordsmen gave an excellent account of their fighting qualities, and after a month-long siege the enemy retreated to Makkah.

In spite of periodic forays in the direction of Madina, the Makkans were unable to gain any victory. The Prophet also wanted peace for Madina. He, therefore, signed a Peace

Treaty at Hudaibya with the envoys of the Makkans. Under it, Muslims were permitted to visit Makkah once a year for three days. Some of the Prophet's companions objected to its provisions, but the Prophet convinced them and they obeyed his command. Indeed, the Treaty of Hudaibya was an act in the line of statesmanship because it paved the way for the eventual capture of Makkah by the forces of Islam under the Prophet's leadership. The Prophet observed every word of the Treaty and as a result of it trade exchanges began between Madina and Makkah. The people-to-people contact led to the spread of knowledge in Makkah of the honesty of the Muslims of Madina and the virtues of the Islamic faith.

Peace Treaty

The period of peace ushered in by the Treaty of Hudaibya gave more time to the Prophet to spread the message of Islam and to consolidate the system of government which he had devised and established in the Islamic state of Madina. He wrote letters to the reigning monarchs of the great nations of that era, inviting them to embrace Islam, the religion of Peace. The King of Egypt sent presents to the Prophet as a mark of respect. The Negus of Abbysinia acknowledged the Prophet as a God-sent Messenger. The Caesar had the Prophet's letter read in his court in Jerusalem. The Emperor of Persia showed disrespect and tore the letter but within a few years his empire was vanquished and Persia entered the fold of Islam.

A Jewish tribe in Khyber near Madina went on the warpath against the Muslims of Madina. The Prophet led a Muslim contingent and won the battle of Khyber. But he showed magnanimity to the vanquished.

Victory over Makkans: Mercy and Compassion

In line with the provisions of the Treaty of Hudaibya, the Prophet and his companions in Madina went on the annual pilgrimage to the Ka'aba in Makkah. But in the following months Makkah's pagan rulers violated the Treaty a number of times and attacked a tribe which had supported the Muslims of Madina. The provocation was so grave and the aggrieved tribe's call for help to Madina was so desperate that the Prophet had no choice but to exert military pressure on the recalcitrant Makkan rulers. It was in the Prophet's knowledge that they were leaving no stone unturned to subvert the stability of the Islamic State in Madina and to ruin its economy. Heading a legion of some ten thousand Muslim warriors from Madina, the Prophet encamped outside the city of Makkah. Keen to avoid bloodshed, the Prophet offered peace to the Makkan rulers if they surrendered and repented.

The arrogant rulers of Makkah were humbled; they had no will to fight and their forces were in disarray. The Prophet asked them to seek Allah's pardon and mercy. Abu Sufyan, a leader of the Makkans and a sworn enemy of the Muslims, surrendered with all his forces and pleaded for mercy from the Prophet. What the Prophet did in this hour of Islam's victory was an act of exemplary magnanimity unprecedented in the history of man. The Prophet forgave the Makkans and their rulers, granted them a general amnesty and appointed Abu Sufyan as the city's Governor after he had embraced Islam. He even bestowed upon the Makkans lthe houses and lands belonging to the Muslim emigrees which they had usurped after they sought refuge in Madina. But he offered no concession on a supremely important matter of principle – the immediate removal of

idols from the Ka'aba in Makkah.

The triumphant entry of the Prophet and his legion of Islam in Makkah was by far the most glorious event in his temporal career as the founder and head of the world's first Islamic State of Madina. Yet there were no trumpets of victory nor the massacre of the vanquished. As the Prophet of Peace, he spared the lives, property and honour of those who had tormented him and his followers during the thirteen years of his Prophethood spent in Makkah. As the benefactor of mankind and the Prophet of mercy and compassion, he hated bloodshed and he had the greatest respect for human life. This was the reason why in this hour of victory over the forces of evil, the sanctity of human life was uppermost in his thoughts. His victorious soldiers entered Makkah not as avenging conquerors but as humble but dignified missionaries in the service of Islam. The cleansing of the Ka'aba, then the symbol of the idolatrous life of the pagan Makkans, was the Prophet's principal objective. Reciting aloud the Quranic verse that "Truth has triumphed and Evil has been wiped out", the Prophet and his companions removed all the idols from the Ka'aba. For the first time, from its minarets echoed the Muslim call to prayer, and the Prophet and his companions prayed in gratitude to the Almighty Allah for crowning their holy mission with the laurels of success.

The Makkan victory of Islam made a deep impact all over Arabia. Many tribes in the towns and villages near Makkah and in the far-flung parts of the Arabian peninsula embraced Islam. But some tribes remained defiant and the Prophet and his soldiers defeated them in the battle of Hunain. As an act of mercy, the Prophet ordered the release of some 6,000

prisoners-of-war belonging to the tribes which had attacked the Islamic forces at Hunain.

News reached the Prophet that the Roman army was preparing for war and a surprise attack on Madina. The Prophet led his contingent of defenders to Tabuk where it was learnt on excellent authority that the Roman army had no marching orders. The Islamic forces forced the heads of a Christian tribe near Tabuk to follow the path of peace towards the Islamic state of Madina and they agreed to a peace arrangement with the Muslims.

The death of the Negus of Abbysinia shocked the Prophet. In words of utter grief, he announced the news of the death of the Negus to the Muslim Community and described him as a true friend of the Muslims. He prayed to the Almighty for the peace of his soul.

On his return to Madina, the Prophet addressed himself to consolidating the spiritual and temporal gains of the Islamic state. He had a premonition that his date with his Maker was not far away. It was the 632 C.E. and the 11th year of the Islamic Hijra era. He went for the annual Hajj pilgrimage to Makkah and told the followers of Islam that it may be the last Hajj of his life. On this occasion, he gave an inspiring sermon to the huge congregation of Muslims which, in the beauty of its language, the nobility and grace of its thought and the Niagra of inspiration, remains unmatched in the annals of human eloquence. His appeal to the Muslims was for faith in God and the brotherhood of Islam, rising above the earthly considerations of race and colour. He made an impassioned plea for the observance of human rights enjoined by Islam, a fair deal to women, outlawing of usury and the freeing of

slaves.

Death

On the 19th of Safar in the 11th year of the Hijri era, the Propher fell ill and for five days he ran high fever. Despite his illness, he continued to offer prayers in the Madina Mosque. He had told his followers that all human beings are mortal and that he too was mortal and the angel of death would claim him some day. In his illness, he deputed one of his most devoted companions Abu Bakr, to lead the prayers in the mosque. One of his last acts was to advise a Muslim congregation never to worship his own grave or those of his companions. His daughter Fatima had a few gold sovereigns in trust from him. he asked her to give them away in charity. As he felt the cold hand of death, the Prophet recited many a time a prayer of gratitude to the Almighty Allah and uttered words of loving farewell to his dear and near ones and the Muslim Community. As was his wish, the Prophet was buried in Madina on the day of his death. He was laid to rest in a grave dug inside the adobe house where he had lived for the most part of his life in Madina. The entire population of Madina was rent by grief and they joined the funeral prayer for him. The Prophet left no riches – except the horse he rode, the sword he carried in battle and a small plot of land.

Peaceful Succession

It goes to the credit of the Prophet that the Islamic State he founded and built in Madina had by then acquired such solid foundations that within 36 hours of his demise, his successor, Hazrat Abu Bakr, was chosen by consensus as the first Caliph of Islam. There was no succession struggle; the transfer of power to the new incumbent was smooth and orderly and the people of Madina promptly acknowledged

him as their spiritual and temporal leader. If the Prophet had wished he could have named his successor but he did not do so deliberately because he wanted the Islamic polity to select his successor. He was basically a democrat and the thought of a dynastic system of leadership in an Islamic polity was not in line with his faith and conduct. As the spiritual and temporal head of the Islamic state of Madina, he denied himself the regalia and the trappings of power to which the high office he held entitled him. The Mosque he built in Madina was his spiritual home; it was also the Secretariat of his Government, the supreme court of Justice and a sacred Community Centre. Above all, it was the House of God. Yet it was a very simple, unostentatious structure.

Islam's Glory

The Prophet insisted that he had not unfolded before mankind a new religion but that Islam's origin dated back to Prophet Abraham and that it was preached by all the God-sent Prophets who followed him, including Moses and Jesus. He said he was sent by God to confirm and preach what these Prophets had said before him for the benefit of mankind. This was one of the reasons why he gave a special status to the Jews and the Christians by describing them as the People of the Book. It was under the Prophet's dynamic and inspiring leadership in Madina that Islam became a vibrant religion with a distinctive ethos, uniting under its umbrella the spiritual and the temporal dimensions of human life and fashioning the format of man's relationship with God as well as with fellow human beings. Long before the Magna Carta in England, the Prophet had drawn up the Covenant of Madina for his infant Islamic State to govern the relationship between the state and the citizen and also between Muslims and non-Muslims. In the state of Madina,

he nurtured Islam's religious institutions and along side with them he created and fostered a body of Islamic laws, a code of conduct for Muslims and the institutions required for governing society.

Emancipation of Women

In the pre-Islam period in Arabia, most women were treated as chattel. Some heartless fathers even killed their female child on her birth. The Prophet condemned this inhuman practice and the Quran outlawed it. Indeed, with the advent of the Islamic state he founded, the emancipation of women in Arabia began. The Quran and the teachings of the Prophet conferred upon women a vast number of rights on par with men. Many of them were rights which women in many Christian countries did not enjoy right upto the early part of the 20th century. The rights Islam gave to Muslim women included the right to own property, the right to have a share in the family inheritance, the right to give evidence in a court of law, the right to engage in trade and commerce, the right to divorce and to claim alimony from the husband. Islam gave marriage the status of a contract, defining the rights and obligations of the husband as well as the wife. In an age and in a country in which a man could have as many wives as he liked, the Quran, in point of fact, discouraged polygamy by laying down the rule that a man should not have more than four wives at a time on the condition that he should treat them equally. What greater proof of the Prophet's immense respect for women and motherhood can there be than his teaching that "Paradise lies under the feet of your mother".

Dislike of Slavery

The Prophet disliked slavery; he freed his own slave and treated him like a son. He encouraged his companions to free

their slaves. He would have completely outlawed slavery but certain economic and social considerations relevant to the age and the country he lived in stood in the way. By his own conduct, he left the Muslims in no doubt that he favoured the freeing of slaves. In pre-Islam Makkah, he saw a slave girl being tormented by her master and he begged him not to do so. In utter anguish, he rushed home and told his wife, Khadijah, how shocked he was by what he had seen. She purchased the slave girl and set her free. By inducting Bilal, a former slave from Africa, into the brotherhood of the Prophet's earliest companions and by designating him as the first Muezzin (the man who calls Muslims to prayer) of the Mosque he built on his arrival in Madina, the Prophet gave the most convincing proof of his faith in the equality of man, his opposition to slavery and also of his sublime belief that Islam knows no barriers of race, colour, clime and tongue.

The Prophet's Historic Journey to Madina
Beginning of Islam's Lunar Calendar

In the thirteenth year of the revelation of the Holy Qur'an to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), he took the historic decision that he and his band of followers should quit the infidel-ruled city of Makkah and emigrate to Madina, the friendly, civilised metropolis some 250 miles away. The cruel pagan rulers of Makkah had subjected the Muslims to persecution and atrocities and reviled their God-sent Prophet. Earlier he had permitted a group of his followers to seek refuge in Abyssinia where the noble Negus gave them sanctuary and spurned the offer of a heap of gold from Makkan emissaries who wanted the Muslim refugees to be handed over to them. Tribal leaders from Madina who heard of Prophet Muhammad's divine teachings and his exemplary conduct met him in Makkah and invited him to make their city his home and spread the word of God from there.

The two dominant tribes in Madina were the Aws and the Kharaj. Their unending feuds marred the peace and beauty of their hometown and they sought the presence of Prophet Muhammad in their midst as the God-sent peace-maker and the teacher of righteousness and brotherhood. They sent twelve of their learned men to Makkah to meet the Prophet and implored him to visit Madina. They were deeply impressed by the inspiring words he spoke and they saw in

him the Messenger of God whose appearance otheir wise ancestors had prophesied. The Prophet suggested that to begin with one of his trusted followers, Mosaab, should accompany them to Madina and acquaint its inhabitants with the teachings of Islam. If the people of Madina were attracted to the word of God, the Prophet assured them that he would go to their hospitable city. A year passed and Mosaab's missionary zeal won over the hearts of many to Islam in Madina. Seventy five wise men from Madina then journeyed to Makkah and met the Prophet at a secret trysting place in Aqba. They repeated their invitation to the Prophet to make Madina his home and teach its people the ways of abiding peace and Godly conduct.

Divine permission had come from the Heavens to Prophet Muhammad to migrate to Madina and spread the word of God. The Prophet accepted the invitation of the kindly, soft-spoken emissaries from Madina to settle in their city provided they promised that they would worship only Allah, obey God's laws and commandements, never kill their female children nor illtreat their women, be truthful and honest and righteous in conduct and stand by him and his followers in testing times. He made it clear to them that he would not belong to any tribe or clan and that he would serve all those who believed in the word of God in letter and deed. The wise men from Madina agreed to the Prophet's conditions and sought in return the assurance that he would never quit their beloved city which he solemnly gave. Islam's history speaks of this historic covenant as the Pledge of Aqaba. It was not executed on any parchment; it was not etched on any rock; it was engraven in the hearts and souls of the inspired men and women who had exchanged the pledges of enduring comradeship in a dry river bed under

the canopy of the Heavens with Angels as witnesses to an act of God. This epochal tryst in the history of Islam was a turning point in the Holy Prophet's divine mission on earth as the Messenger of God. The way to the founding of the world's first Islamic State in Madina now lay wide open.

Word went from the Prophet to his followers in Makkah and its neighbouring villages to go to Madina in small groups. At night, bands of the Faithful – men, women and children – sought the blessing of their Prophet and slipped out of Makkah on the way to Madina. It was a perilous journey across a vast and unfriendly desert with the lurking danger of murderous attacks by their Makkan persecutors. With faith in God and the prayers of their Prophet, they rode into the darkness of the desert like little specks on the star-studded horizon.

After all his followers had safely escaped from Makkah, Prophet Muhammad decided to undertake the fateful journey to Madina. The pgan rulers of Makkah conspired to murder him. Warned by the God he worshipped, the Prophet escaped from Makkah in the nick of time. As the murderers sent by the heathen lords of Makkah burst into his room at the dead of night, they found Hazrat Ali and not the Prophet they planned to kill. Irked by his dramatic escape from their wrath, they offered a hundred camels as a reward for his capture and sent bands of swordsmen in hot pursuit. Guided by the light of God, the Prophet and his trusted lieutenant, Hazrat Abu Bakr, were ensconced in the safety of the Cave of Thaur on the outskirts of Makkah. The bloodthirsty pagans came close to the cave but the spiders' web and the pigeons' nests at its entrance convinced them that no man could dwell in such inhospitable rocks. The

shield of Heavenly protection saved Prophet Muhammad and also the man who was destined to be Islam's first Caliph. Their pursuers gave up the pursuit.

Having enjoyed the bliss and hospitality of the Cave of Thaur for four days and nights, the Prophet and Abu Bakr rode into the emptiness of the desert mounted on two camels furnished by a good-hearted Bedouin, Abdullah bin Uraiqit, who became their guide for the historic journey to Madina. For a whole week, the brave trio saw nothing but sand in the sun-baked desert; at night a merciful moon lighted their path and the stars showed the way to the haven of their epic journey, Madina. The Prophet and his loyal followers prayed to God and their hearts were filled with the joys of the Heavens. The two tireless camels – ships of the desert – bore their charges faithfully, leaving tell-tale footprints in the sand. But no one came in pursuit except a lone horseman who met the trio in the desert and embraced Islam.

A little more than a week after they had left the Cave of Thaur near Makkah, the Prophet and his companion, Abu Bakr, along with their guide, Arqat, entered the city of Madina. Almost the entire population turned out in their best clothes and in a festive mood to welcome the Prophet whose coming they had looked forward to with joy and cheer in their hearts. At the head of the reception line were the wise men and women of the city who had invited him to Madina and the bands of the Faithful who had preceded him in journeying to the Queen of cities. There is some difference of opinion amongst historians about the exact date on which the Prophet entered Madina: some say it was the 22nd day of June in the year 622 of the Christian era; others claim it was the 20th day of September, 622, C.E. Whatever be the date

according to the Christian calender, the annals of history cannot deny the fact that the Prophet's arrival in Madina in the 13th year of the Holy Quran's revelation made history. It marked the commencement of Islam's lunar calendar, the first day of the first year of the Islamic era.

With the completion of the Prophet's emigration to Madina – the Hegira – the Muslim calendar began. Fourteen hundred years ago the Prophet of Islam entered Madina, riding the faithful camel, Qaswa, alighted from it at the spot which it chose to buckle its knees and dismount its God-sent rider. The tribal chiefs of Madina offered him their palatial houses as his abode but the statesman that he was, the Prophet let the innocent camel select the place where he would build the House of God, the Prophet's Mosque in the city which would now become his home and, in a short while, the City of God on earth. Standing erect on the hump of his loyal and devoted camel,the Prophet spoke to the large concourse of those who had waited long and gathered to welcome him in Madina.

Thus opened a new chapter in the history of mankind. The Emigration to Madina – the Hegira – freed Islam from the shackles of Makkan persecution and Madina became the first fortress of Islam, a lighthouse of God from where the Divine word spread to all parts of the globe.

First Mosque in Madina
Its Importance in Muslim Community

The first major undertaking by Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) after he led his band of devoted followers from Makkah to Madina was to build Islam's first Mosque in the city of his adoption. The site he chose in Madina for constructing the first House of God in this hospitable metropolis was the spot where his faithful camel, Qaswa, which had borne him all the way from Makka to Madina, buckled its knees and dismounted its holy rider. The site was a small field bounded by five tall palm trees which could be seen in the oasis even from a distance. The Prophet consulted his faithful followers and decided that this was the spot where he would build forthwith Madina's first mosque.

At dawn, shortly after the Prophet and his followers had said their morning prayers, they busied themselves in building the Mosque. They cleared the scrub, levelled the ground, made bricks and gathered stones and boulders for use in the construction work. The design of the Mosque was conceived by the Prophet himself. He took counsel from his associates but obviously the grand design for the first House of God in Madina was divinely inspired. The Prophet was acquainted with the architectural designs of the Christian churches and the Jewish synagogues but he wanted the Muslim Mosque to represent Islam's nobility and simplicity.

In addition to being a place of worship, he wanted the Mosque to be the hub of the spiritual and temporal life of the Muslim community in Madina. Enshrined in the design of the Mosque built by the Prophet in Madina was the concept that it should correspond to church, townhall, school and hostel, all under one roof.

The Prophet's mosque in Madina was what architects call the open-plan mosque. Built over a rectangular area, it had sufficient open and covered space for the Muslim community to offer its congregational prayers. It had a niche but no dome or minarets. The walls were strong and the roof was thick and sturdy. It had a pulpit from where the Prophet delivered his sermon to the congregation of the Faithful.

What was remarkable about the construction of this history-making Mosque in Madina was the fact that although the Prophet and his loyal followers had reached the haven of their journey after a strenuous camel-ride in the desert, they built the mosque with inexhaustible energy and astonishing speed. In true comradeship, the Prophet broke stones, baked bricks, made mortar, climbed ladders and plastered the walls and roof along with his devoted associates. The inhabitants of Madina volunteered to help the Prophet in building the Mosque and it was a pleasant, heart-wearming sight to see dozens of children joyfully helping their elders in the construction of the Mosque. The well-built Hazrat Hamza carried huge stones and mounds of bricks on his shoulders and never showed a sign of exhaustion on his face. Hazrat Abu-Bakr, Hazrat Omar, Hazrat Ali and Hazrat Bilal were amongst the Prophet's devoted followers who worked day and night to get the mosque completed in the shortest time. The mosque was,

indeed, a collective undertaking and each and every member of the newly-arrived Muslim community in Madina and many of its original inhabitants made their historic contribution to its construction. Surprisingly, there was no mishap. It seemed that the omnipresent Allah was Himself guiding the Prophet and his team of mosque-builders. Water from the nearby well was in plentiful supply. The fringe of palm trees provided a welcome shade to the builders and the smile on the Prophet's handsome face cheered them. They were inspired by the words of the Prophet that "work is indeed a kind of prayer" and that "God loves the hand of a workman". Their excellent teamwork in building the House of God made a great impression on the people of Madina.

The food which the Prophet and his associates ate at mealtime was meagre but the act of eating together while at work made the meal enjoyable. The builders of the Mosque would often sing hymns to God and the Prophet in a chorus. But when the time for prayer came, the Prophet and his associates would leave work and join in prayer to the Almighty. The families of the Muslims who had migrated from Makkah to Madina gave their help, support and encouragement to their menfolk in building the Prophet's Mosque. The inhabitants of Madina marvelled at the spirit of dedication, solidarity and comradeship they saw in the Muslim emigrants from Makka and their impeccable conduct. They were also struck by the high-minded and noble leadership the Prophet gave to the Muslim community and his utter selflessness. Word also got around in Madina of the humane virtues of Islam's great Prophet. If he noticed that the burden of bricks was back-breaking for the donkey, he would see to it that it was lightened. He disliked cruelty in any form not only to human beings but to animals as well.

While the Mosque was being built, a little child who was watching the laying of the bricks on the walls ran to the Prophet and begged that he be allowed to lay a few bricks. The Prophet was touched by the child's gesture; he swept him into his arms and put a small brick into his tiny hands. "Put the brick on the wall", the Prophet told the excited toddler. After the child had done what he was told, the Prophet said to him: "Now you can say that you helped me in building this great Mosque ". He then let the child scamper back to his mother with the exciting news that he helped the beloved Prophet in the construction of the Mosque.

The Prophet raised no fund for the construction of the mosque in Madina. The male members of the Muslim community donated their time and labour free of charge. They pooled their savings to pay for the construction material used in the building of the Mosque. The people of Madina were astonished at the spirit of self-reliance shown by the newcomers from Makkah and their upright conduct.

In a few weeks what was only a vision became a reality; the construction of the Prophet's Mosque was completed. The hearts of the Muslims in Madina were filled with joy on the accomplishment of their first major collective undertaking in Madina. The Mosque was the embodiment of their religious aspirations as a distinct community; it was the focal point of their activity as a nascent society; it was the home of their spiritual and temporal leader; it was his court and secretariat; above all, it was the House of God wherein the Muslim community gathered daily to say their prayers and invoked divine blessings. When the Mosque was completed, the Prophet and his followers discussed what mode of

announcement should they follow to summon Muslims to the Mosque at prayer-time. Some suggested a bell; others thought of a drum or a horn. The people discussed the matter in the assembly of his close associates. It was Hazrat Abdullah Bin Zaid who told the Prophet that he had a dream in which he saw that it was a human voice which called the Faithful to their prayer in the Mosque. The issue was decided; the Prophet saw the divine guidance. His eye fell on Hazrat Bilal, the black Abyssinian slave whom Islam had made a free man and a trusted follower of the Prophet. The Holy Prophet made Bilal Islam's first *Muezzin*. It was a signal honour for the young African. In Islam, colour and race have no meaning; those who join the fold of Islam are brothers and sisters in their uniting faith in God and His Prophet.

The Prophet instructed Bilal in the mode of call and the words he should utter while calling Muslims to pray in the Mosque. Watched by the concourse of expectant Muslims, Bilal clambered on to the roof top of the Mosque and gave the prayer call beginning with the inspiring words: "God is great". His resonant words echoed all over the oasis and the word of God was heard in every house in Madina. "My mosque is completed", said the Prophet of God to Bilal as he descended from the roof after uttering the prayer-call. So long as he lived, it was Bilal's privilege to mount the roof of the mosque five times a day and summon Muslims to their prayer.

As the size of the Muslim community in Madina expanded and the Prophet founded the world's first Islamic state, the role of the Mosque assumed many dimensions. It became Islam's all-important foundational institution. The Muslim community in Madina loved and venerated the Prophet's

Mosque. He and his family lived within its compound and the Faithful who came to pray also met him daily; so close was the rapport between the Prophet and his flock. He led them in prayer and his Friday congregational address cemented their faith in Islam. As Madina progressed towards statehood, the Prophet used the Mosque even as a Council Room and a Reception Hall, a kind of Secretariat for the Islamic State he founded, and delegations from Arabia and abroad came to see him there. He also dispensed justice from the precincts of the Mosque to the Muslim community. He held grand asemblies of the Muslims of Madina to discuss spiritual and temporal matters, problems of administration, political issues and social and economic themes and the framing of defence strategy when Madina was threatened by hostile forces.

The Prophet's Mosque in Madina was the venue for Islam's important religious festivals and the social get-togethers of the Muslim community. Even for marriages they thronged to the Mosque to have the marital contract blessed with the Prophet's presence. A propagator of education, Prophet also used the mosque for educating the Muslim community. A part of it in later years served as a Community Chest – the *Baitul Maal*. The chronicles of the early days of Islam showed that a band of Abyssinians presented a simple, rhythmic play with sticks in the courtyard of the Prophet's Mosque in Madina and the Prophet and his wife, Hazrat Ayesha, witnessed the performance. The Muslim community respected the sanctity of the Mosque but it was not isolated from their social and corporate life. It was a living institution – the imperishable base of the Islamic way of life. The light of Islam thus radiated from the House of God built by His Prophet in Madina.

Prophet'a Exemplary Statesmanship and Administration

Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) gave to the world the most dynamic religion in man's history. In spite of the passage of nearly fourteen centuries, its pristine strength has not waned. From Morocco to Indonesia, across two populous continents, it constitutes a powerful spiritual and temporal force, holding s way over the hearts and minds of more than 900 million people. And the number of its followers in many other parts of the world has continued to swell with each passing year.

The reasons for the astonishing sweep of Islam across the earth lie in its indestructible vigour and extraordinary simplicity, the conviction that God is omnipresent and omniscient and the eternal belief that all Muslims belong to a globe-girdling brotherhood that transcends racial, linguistic and geographical barriers. Aside from the divine inspiration which gave Islam its everlasting anchor, it was the many-splendoured genius of the Prophet which enabled our great religion to surge through Asia, Europe and Africa in a remarkably short span of time.

The Prophet's success in uniting the warring Arab tribes, in weaning them away from the worship of idols and in transforming them into the legions of Allah who would carry the word of God to every nook and corner of the world

represents the sublime of inspired statesmanship. As the spiritual and temporal ruler of Arabia, he devised a system of government whose wisdom, justness and foresight have no parallel. As the faithful Messenger of God, as a dedicated religious and social reformer, as a courageous military commander, as an impeccably honest and judicious administrator and as a versatile statesman, the glories of the Prophet's accomplishments remain unmatched. He translated into practice every word of what he preached; his stewardship of Arabia's destiny was indeed a happy alliance of theory and practice.

Very aptly, a British historian, *John William Draper,* described the Prophet of Islam as "the man who of all men has exercised the greatest influence upon the human race". Napoleon Bonaparte was so impressed by the greatness of the Prophet's achievements that he said: "In a few years, the Muslims conquered half of the world. They snatched away more souls from false gods, pulled down more idols, demolished more pagan temples in fifteen years than the followers of Moses and Jesus did in fifteen centuries. Muhammed was a great man".

IDEOLOGICAL STATE

Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) founded the first Islamic state during the years of his prophetic mission. Initially, Madina and its neighbourhood were the confines of this righteous and ideological state but within a decade it encompassed a great part of the Arabian peninsula. As its head of state and chief executive, the Prophet made the pursuit of peace, justice and piety the directive principles of his state policy. The fraternal relationship which he fostered

and cemented between the emigrants from Makkah and the people of Madina and the covenants of peace he worked out with non-Muslim communities were in the line of farsighted statesmanship. Making equality of man the foundational principle of the Islamic state, the Prophet endowed it with a written constitution. It was framed in consultation with the representatives of both Muslim and non-Muslim inhabitants and it recognised the freedom of religion for all.

While the fires of religious intolerance burnt savagely in most parts of the world, the Prophet devised an enlightened and liberal code to govern the relations between the Islamic state and its non-Muslim inhabitants. He made them equal partners with the Muslim citizens in contributing to the material progress of the State and in the enjoyment of its fruits and blessings. For all the protection and security which the non-Muslims or *Zimmis* enjoyed, they were required to pay a very small tax or *Jizya*. Indigent and disabled members of non-Muslim communities and women and children were exempt from its levy. The Prophet's eminently humane and liberal treatment of the religious minorities was in harmony with the injunctions of the Holy Qur'an. As a statesman, he rose above society's rooted prejudices and demonstrated that the primacy of religious commandments and the ultimacy of obedience to Almighty God should guide the conduct of temporal affairs and state-craft.

AMAZING MAGNANIMITY

What nobler example of statesmanship can history furnish than the magnanimity of the Prophet when he rode on the crest of victory into the recalcitrant town of Makkah. He soared above the heights of mortal men when he forgave

the defeated pagan Makkans in spite of all the atrocious torments and fortures they had inflicted on him over the years. He granted them total amnesty; he even renounced the claim for the return of the Muslim property which the pagan rulers of Makkah had confiscated in order to oppress the Muslims. A Makkan tribal chief, who was at one time a sworn enemy of the Prophet, was so touched by his generosity and humanitarian conduct that he embraced Islam. The Prophet appointed him the Governor of Makkah and posted no soliders to police the conquered city. An eminent British historian, Stanley Lanepoole, was so moved by this spectacle of almost celestial benevolence in the panorama of Islamic History that he reverently commented: "The day of Muhammed's greatest triumph over his enemies was also the day of his grandest victory over himself. He freely forgave the Koreysh all the years of sorrow and cruel scorn in which they had afflicted him and gave an amnesty to the whole population of Makkah. The Prophet's magnanimity impressed the Makkans so greatly that within a short time most of them embraced Islam. He won by a stroke of statesmanship what thousands of swords would not have accomplished.

In the practice of statesmanship, the Prophet fashioned for the world's first Islamic state a dynamic foreign policy based on the ethical postulates of his universal religion. At no time was it tainted by aggression, duplicity or breach of plighted word on the part of the Prophet's Government. All the wars fought by Muslims during the lifetime of the Prophet were defensive in character. This was largely because of the Prophet's aversion to unnecessary bloodshed; he laid stress on the virtue of maintaining peace and respecting the sanctity of human life. Neither the Qur'an nor the Prophet

called for the waging of war against non-Muslims, except in self-defence. In all the wars extending over a decade, not more than 759 non-Muslims were killed on the field of battle and the Muslim loss of life was even less. Times out of number, the Prophet commanded his followers even in the heat of battle to spare the life of the defeated enemy. He waged war gallantly and humanely and once its clang and clatter was over he sought to preserve peace tenaciously. His war against the Roman Empire in 628 C.E. was launched when a Governmental functionary of the Court at Constantinople wantonly killed a Muslim envoy from Arabia. Centuries before enlightened nations devised the Geneva Conventions to curb brutality in wars, the Prophet prescribed this noble code of conduct for his soldiers: "In avenging the injuries inflicted upon us, disturb not the inmates of the shrines and monasteries, spare women and children, touch not the suckling infant and the patients in bed. Do not destroy the dwellings of the unresisting inhabitants and their means of subsistence and spare the fruit trees".

The Prophet's amicable relations with the Negus of Abyssinia (because of the asylum he gave to the Muslim refugees from pagan Makkah) and the thoughtful protocol and hospitality he showed while receiving the Christian emissaries from that country were a model of high statesmanship and correct diplomatic etiquette. The letters which the Prophet wrote to the rulers of non-Muslim countries, inviting them to join the fold of Islam, were couched in graceful language and inspiring words, and the emissaries who were chosen to carry them to the courts of the mighty bore themselves with admirable dignity. This was indeed the result of the Prophet's instruction and training.

PARADIGM OF SIMPLICITY AND HONESTY

In spite of the command he had over the hearts of men and the power he wielded as the ruler of Madina, the Prophet's way of life continued to be a paradigm of simplicity and honesty. Even at the zenith of his glory, the style of his attire was no different from the drab clothes he wore when the Angel Gabriel unfolded before him the Word of God at Mount Hira. He shunned the paraphernalia of power; he built no palaces; he set up no court for himself and he hired no courtly retinue. The simple, prosaic mosque that he built at Madina was the seat of his Government and he was accessible to every inhabitant who lived in his expanding domain. In the exercise of authority, he never lost touch with his people. At times, he turned the Mosque into a parliamentary forum where the grand dialectics of public debate where conducted to discover the practical truth and to ascertaint he people's will. Struck by the Prophet's simple living, Thomes Carlyle wrote: "No emperor with his tiaras was obeyed more as this man in the cloak of his own clouting". Another renowned writer, Bosworth Smith, commented: "Head of the State as well as the Church, he was Caesar and Pope in one; but he was Pope without the Pope's pretentions and Caesar without the legions of Caesar. Without a standing Army, without a bodyguard, without a fixed revenue, if ever a man had the right to rule by a divine right it was Muhammed for he had all the power without its instruments and without its support".

The art of "state-housekeeping" is in the line of

statesmanship, and in this mundane realm too, the Prophet showed an amazing grasp over the complex nature and intricacies of public finance. He imposed no onerous taxes; he innovated no exorbitant levies. He instituted a system of public finance in harmony with Qur'anic injunctions and the demands of social justice. It gave ballast to the nation's economy at home and furnished the means for the spread of Islam beyond the frontiers of Arabia. No prophet nor ruler can surpuss the Prophet's prudent management of the economy and the careful husbandry of national resources. The institution of the Baitul Mal, a kind of state-run community chest, was an outstanding example of his innovative genius.

The concept of Islamic fraternity that all those who enter the foldof Islam become brethren in faith was rendered into practice by the Prophet. It gave Islam a global perspective and an indestructible binding force. Impressed by the vitality and universality of this great concept, the reputed British historian, Arnold Toynbee, offered this bouquet of praise: "The extinction of race consciousness as between Muslims is one of the outstanding achievements of Islam, and in this contemporary world there is, as it happens, a crying need for the propagation of this Islamic virtue." In a similar vein, a noted American writer, James Michener, lauded the fraternal base of Islamic society in these words: "More than most religions, Islam preaches the brotherhood of all races, colours and nations within its fold". As a statesman, par excellence, the Prophet had the vision to divine what lay in the womb of the future and to devise a religious order, a socio-economic system and a structure of good Government that would shelter and nurture under its umbrageous roof people drawn from diverse tribes and nationalities. To

consolidate the ties of kinship amongst Muslims, was among the many objects for which he established the institution of annual pilgrimage at Makkah.

INSPIRING SERMON

There could be no better exposition of the Islamic ideal of the brotherhood of believing men and women than the Prophet of Islam's inspiring sermon on the occasion of his last pilgrimage at Makkah. In words of unmatched eloquence, he preached that "no Arab has superiority over a non-Arab and no non-Arab has superiority over an Arab". "No dark-skinned person", he said, "is superior to a white person and no white person is superior to a dark-skinned person". The criteria of honour in the sight of God, ruled the Prophet, is righteousness and honest living.

The meticulous care with which the Prophet honoured his treaties and compacts with the tribes of Arabia, the relationship of peace and amity that he sought with his neighbouring States in a spirit of co-existence, the exemplary tolerance he and his Administration showed to non-Muslims, especially the Christians and the Jews, and his determined efforts for raising the status of women and for the emancipation of slaves constitute the most inspiring essays in statesmanship.

The 19th century French historian and statesman, Alphonse de Lamartine, was so overwhelmed by the grandeur of the achievements of the Prophet that he effused thus in praise of him: "Philosoper, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational dogma and of a cult without images; the founder of twenty terrestrial

empires and of one spiritual empire, that is Muhammed. Judged by all the standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask: Is there any man greater than he?"

Statesman and empire-builders who have trodden the scene of human history often failed to build a mechanism for the peaceful transfer of power and for the continuance of the system of governance they bequeathed. Having led the people of Arabia from the darkness of their benighted, idolatrous existence into the sunshine of greatness and piety, the Prophet established no dynasty nor did he invest himself with the regalia of kingship. Yet the political institutions he established were so sound and durable that when he was sadly no more amongst the living, the nascent Islamic state experienced no pangs of a succession struggle and the mantle of authority was passed on to the first Caliph in a peaceful, orderly manner, with the consent of the governed. A British biographer of the Prophet, Montgomery Watt, took particular note of this admirable forte in his practice of statesmanship and his administrative skill, and wrote: "When Muhammed died, the state he founded was a going concern, able to withstand the shock of his removal and, once it had recovered from the shock, to expand at prodigious speed".

Islam Outlawed Racial Discrimination and Colour Bar
Prophet's Example of Racial Equality

Racial discrimination and colour bar are alien to Islam. In the world's first Islamic State founded in Madina fourteen centuries ago, Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) established a harmonious and well-knit society in which black, brown and white were blended in the great brotherhood of Islam. After he migrated from Makkah to Madina to make it the launching-pad for the spread of Islam in the world, one of his first acts in the service of God was to build Islam's first mosque on earth. What greater proof of his belief in the equality of races could there be than the fact that he made a black African, Hazrat Bilal, the first *Muezzin* of Islam – the man who called Muslims five times a day to pray in the House of God. The honour which the Prophet of God conferred on Bilal was unique; it symbolised Islam's war against slavery and racism; it proclaimed in letter and deed the Prophet's faith in the dignity of man; it rendered into practice the Islamic concept of human rights; it was an epochal accomplishment of the Islamic Revolution led by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Ebony-coloured Bilal was born in Makkah, the son of an Abyssinian slave, *Rabah,* who was sold into slavery in Ethiopia and transported across the Red Sea to Arabia where a rich Makkan trader bought him. The child of a slave, Bilal, was purchased in the slave market in Makkah by an Arab

merchant, Umaya. His master treated him harshly and at times tortured him brutally. Bilal's soul glowed with a new hope when he saw Prophet Muhammad in Makkah and heard his inspiring words about God, the Creator of the Universe, and the equality and fraternity of all mankind. These were strange but stirring words to hear for a black slave in Makkah where slave-owners were often inhuman.

Bilal was one of the very early Makkan converts to Islam. When his master, Umaya, learnt of what to him was a heresy, he flung him hand-tied into the dungeon where disobedient slaves were punished and then he was savagely flogged until he became senseless. Even as the whip cracked on his bare body, Bilal thought and spoke of God and His Prophet. It looked like a test of Bilal's newly-found faith in God and, indeed, God did not let him down. It turned out to be the day of his spiritual and physical emancipation. A trusted companion of the Prophet, Hazrat Abu Bakr, bought Bilal from his fiendish master and set him free. It was the will of the Prophet that Bilal should be rescued from his tormentor and made a free man. In Hazrat Abu Bakr's house, the Prophet prayed for Bilal; the wounds caused by the flogging healed soon and he was nursed back to health.

In the company of his close companions, the Prophet received and embraced Bilal and inducted him into the fold of Islam. Bilal was now a free man, a Muslim and a faithful companion of Islam's God-sent Prophet. He represented Black Africa in the early clan of Islam. As a slave he could never think of rubbing shoulders with the elders of the proud and arrogant tribe of Quraish in Makkah. As a Muslim, he sat on terms of equality with many of them in the Prophet's company. The Prophet's religion had no place for

slavery; it treated all men and women as the children of Adam and Eve; it knew no barriers of race and colour. In the eternal brotherhood of Islam, preached by the Prophet, all men and women are equal.

For 22 long and eventful years, Bilal was the Prophet's devoted companion and the caller of the Faithful to prayer. The Prophet could have made one of his Arab companions Islam's first *Muezzin* but he chose a black African for this great honour and privilege. Also assigned to Bilal was the joyful duty of waking up the Prophet every morning just before prayer-time in the room where he slept next to the Mosque he built in Madina.

One of the other durable links the Prophet had with Black Africa was his friendship with the Negus of Abyssinia. The God-fearing Negus had given refuge to the band of early Muslims who fled from persecution in Makkah. He had spurned tempting offers in gold from the Makkan rulers for the return of these brave Muslims. The Prophet held the Negus in high esteem and corresponded with him, inviting him to join the fold of Islam. The Prophet treated with utmost respect and hospitality the emissaries from the court of the Negus. In fact, the relationship of trust and cooperation established by the Prophet between the Islamic State of Madina and the non-Muslim African kingdom of Abyssinia furnishes Islam's earliest practice of the philosophy of peaceful co-existence between Muslim and non-Muslim States. The hospitality and cordiality shown to the emissaries from the Negus in Prophet Muhammad's Islamic State of Madina are an excellent example of the refined diplomatic procedure and practice evolved by him as the temporal and spiritual ruler of Madina. In developing

amicable ties with Abyssinia, the Prophet gave another proof of Islam's religious and racial tolerance. A black African, Bilal was the Prophet's trusted Companion; a black African State, Abyssinia, was the Islamic State's trusted friend. Could there be a better example of the practice of co-existence? (What a tragedy that the present-day rulers of Ethiopia are holding Muslim-majority Eriterea in bondage by the sheer majesty of force!)

The Prophet's most categorical denunciation of slavery and racism was made in the historic sermon he gave on the occasion of the last Hajj pilgrimage of his life. He said to the huge concourse of Muslims: 'O, the people, listen to and obey even though a mangled Abyssinian slave is your *Emir* (ruler) if he enforces the ordinances of the Book of Allah (the Holy Qur'an) amongst you." The Prophet thus threw open the highest offices in the state he founded to the non-Arabs as well. The gist of Islam's teaching was to outlaw slavery as an institution. But fourteen centuries ago the economic and social system in Arabia was such that it would have been too drastic and, indeed, an impractical measure to ban it totally. Islam, therefore, prescribed it as a virtue for its followers to free slaves, and the Prophet's devoted Companions set an example of it by buying freedom for Bilal. In his last Hajj sermon, the Prophet said: "As for your slaves, see that you feed them with such food as you eat yourselves and clothe them with the clothes that you yourselves wear. And if they commit a fault which you are are not inclined to forgive, then part with them for they are the servants of Allah and are not to be chastised."

Even before the heavenly Angel Gabriel revealed to Prophet Muhammad the word of God in the cave of Hira in

Makkah, his deep concern for the wellbeing of slaves in the city of his birth was well known. He never owned a slave but his heart was touched sorely by their plight. He saw a slaveboy cowering under the weight of the burden he carried on his back. The Prophet rushed to his help and carried on his own back most of what the boy was required to transport by his master. The Prophet was in mental anguish when he saw a slavegirl being beaten up by her cruel master in a public square in Makkah. He pleaded mercy for the bruised girl but her owner turned a deaf ear and persisted in whipping her. Sad and agitated, the Prophet told his beloved wife, Hazrat Khadija, what he had seen and the shock this brutal scene had given him. A devoted wife, Hazrat Khadija bought the slavegirl the next day and set her free. The Prophet was immensely pleased. She had done what she knew was the Prophet's wish – that slaves should be freed.

Centuries before the French Revolution, the Prophet preached to mankind the inspiring message of human equality and fraternity and sounded the trumpet of war against racism and what the 20th century knows as the South African rulers' racist doctrine of *apartheid*. In his last Hajj sermon, The Prophet thus commanded his followers: "O people, verily your Lord is one and your father is one. All of you are the progeny of Adam and Adam was created out of clay. There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab and for a non-Arab over an Arab; nor for the white over the black or the black over the white, except in piety and righteousness. Verily the noblest among you is he who is the most pious." The Prophet uttered these high and noble words in a predominantly Arab gathering in an age when the Arabs considered themselves a superior race. By his revolutionary commandment, the Prophet outlawed for all

time from the world of Islamany thought of racial superiority or colour bar. The religion he preached was universal in its scope and content; the message of God which he gave to the world was for all mankind. The colour of one's skin had no meaning in the Islamic way of life; in the eyes of the Prophet the criterion for respect and honour in the Muslim community was one's piety and obedience to the will of God as revealed in the Holy Qur'an.

Islam's precept of human equality and brotherhood of man is as valid and worthy of emulation today as it was 1400 years ago. It was this great revolutionary doctrine which gave Islam the universal appeal it won in a few decades, enabling it to surge across the desert of Arabia and establish itself as one of the most widely-practised religions in three populous contients - Asia, Africa and Europe. In the USA, multitudes of Afro-Americans have found new hope and vigour in the fold of Islam and its tenet of human equality. They are impressed by the fact that some twelve centuries before Abraham Lincoln waged a war against slavery in the New World, the Prophet had commanded his followers to free slaves. Some of Islam's renowned generals were former slaves who found freedom, honour, dignity and recognition of their worth in the Islamic fraternity. The example was set by the Holy Prophet himself who made Bilal, a black Muslim, Islam's first Muezzin.

The Holy Prophet and Religious Minorities
Exemplary Tolerance, Justice, Fairplay

Religious tolerance is one of the hallmarks of Islam. The Qur'anic injunction is that there should be no compulsion in the propagation of religion and that non-Muslims must not be converted to Islam by force.

In administering the world's first Islamic State, Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) followed these divinely-ordained tenets with utmost devotion and established a highly civilised and just society in which the person, property and religious beliefs of the followers of other religions were sedulously protected and respected.

The written constitution with which the Prophet endowed Madina, in consultation with the representatives of its Muslim and non-Muslim inhabitants, recognised the freedom of religion for all. He made the non-Muslim inhabitants equal partners with the Muslim citizens in the material progress and wealth of the state.

For all the protectiona nd security, which the non-Muslims enjoyed in the Islamic State established by the Prophet fourteen centuries ago, they were required to pay a very small tax *(Jizya)* to the Government treasury. By virtue of this puny payment to the state, they were also exempted from being pressed into military service for the country's defence

in wartime. The indigent and disabled members of the non-Muslim community and women and children were not required to pay this levy.

In line with the commandments of the Holy Qur'an, the Prophet devised an enlightened and liberal code to govern the relations between the Islamic State and its non-Muslim inhabitants. They were given the freedom to pursue their religious beliefs unhindered and their places of worship were protected. Their landed property and other worldly possessions were duly safe-guarded by the State. They were free to practise their vocations, enter into business and spend their wealth as they pleased.

EXEMPLARY CLEMENCY

After his resounding victory over the pagan rulers of Makkah who had tormented him for years, the Prophet set one of the noblest examples of magnanimity by granting total amnesty to the defeated foe. A Makkah chieftain was so moved by this humane and benevolent gesture of the Prophet that he embraced Islam. The Prophet appointed him the Governor of Makkah. He also renounced the claim for the return of the Muslim-owned property which was confiscated by Makkah's pagan rulers in earlier years. Without leaving a single soldier in the conquered city of Makkah, the Prophet retired to Madina, the capital of the Islamic state of Arabia. In an age when the pillage and destruction of vanquished cities was considered the birthright of the conquerors, the Prophet's exemplary generosity towards the defeated heathens of Makkah was a beacon of Islam's civilised conduct in war and peace.

In preaching the tenets of Islam, the Prophet laid stress on the virtue of maintaining peace and respecting the sanctity of human life. Neither the Holy Qur'an nor the Prophet called for the waging of war against non-Muslims, except in self-defence or when they were engaged in conspiracies to destroy the Islamic state. Indeed, Islam is categorically opposed to aggression.

In conducting the affairs of state, the Prophet followed theQur'anic injunction: "Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Verily, Allah does not love the aggressors". In order to avoid unnecessary bloodshed and in the pursuit of peace and co-existence, the Prophet concluded treaties with non-Muslim tribes and neighbours which in the process of implementation worked at times to the disadvantage of the Muslims. But he never violated his plighted word and strictly adhered tothe letter and spirit of the treaties he signed and the covenants he entered into.

His sense of chivalry and his magnanimity and tolerance towards the vanquished are models of human greatness. In all the battles fought over a period of more than ten years under the direction of the Prophet, not more than 759 non-Muslims were slain while the Muslim loss of life was even less. Times out of number, the Prophet commanded his courageous followers on the field of battle to spare the life of the defeated enemy. Even those adversaries and spies who sought to assassinate the Prophet were pardoned by him. It is unique in the annals of human history that the Prophet's sword, tested in the fire of so many battles, never shed a man's blood. As the Messenger of God whose mission was to lead mankind on the pathway to peace, brotherhood and

righteousness, the Prophet's respect for the sanctity of human life was an article of faith with him. The soldiers of God under his command were instructed not to disfigure the corpses of the fallen enemy nor to kill the wounded foe who sought mercy.

BENIGN MERCY

In his dealings with the Jews and the Christians – the People of the Book – the Prophet showed immense good will and understanding in harmony with the Qur'anic tenet that their Prophets were God-sent. The Islamic state respected their Scriptures and their places of worship. The prophet observed the agreements he had concluded with the Jewish tribes in Madina and its neighbourhood. It was only when some of them broke their pledges and resorted to subversive activity that Madina's Islamic state was compelled to take punitive action. The provocative acts of the Jewish tribe of Banu Qainuqa forced the Muslims to lay siege to their fortress. When the Jews surrendered unconditionally, the Prophet showed them benign mercy and gave them their freedom. This was one of the many examples of the profound tolerance shown by the Prophet to the religious minorities in the Islamic state he built. He demonstrated in practice that Islam is a religion of peace and universal brotherhood.

Jihad was enjoined upon Muslims by the Prophet only in self-defence or against those who committed oppression on the followers of Allah. Once war was terminated, the Muslims, in conformity with the Prophet's injunction, showed mercy and generosity to the defeated non-Muslims, permitting them to follow their way of life and religious

belief and to conduct their business and vocations.

ISLAMIC TRADITION OF TOLERANCE

Those who charge that Islam was spread through the sword betray a palpable ignorance of Islamic history. If there was any substance in this allegation, then there should have been no non-Muslims left in the many populous countries which saw Muslim rule for centuries, such as Spain, the Balkans, India and the Philippines. The tradition of religious tolerance, set by the Prophet and rooted in Qur'anic injunctions, was followed by his successors, the four Caliphs, and their generals in their military exploits in three continents. In the centuries that followed, Muslim conquerors, by and large, honoured the Islamic tradition of tolerance towards the non-Muslims. In the Dark Ages, when the Jews were outcasts in Europe, they prospered in Muslim-ruled Spain and in the Arab Middle East. Despite the bitter memories of the Crusades, which were inflicted on the Muslims by the Christian rulers of Europe and the Papacy, Saladin the Great followed the noble tradition of tolerance and mercy handed down to the Muslims by the Prophet when he allowed the defeated aggressors from Europe to return to their homes in freedom and peace and conferred on them the right to visit Christianity's holy places in Muslim-ruled Jerusalem. So long as this Holy City remained under Muslim rule, Christians and Jews alike enjoyed unfettered freedom of access and worship and Government funds were spent on the repair and maintenance of their shrines.

The Prophet and the Christians

In conformity with the Quranic dictum that Christians and Jews are "people of the Book" and their Prophets were messengers of God, Prophet Muhammad showed a special consideration to them. When the Angel Gabriel visited him in the Cave of Hira and gave him the tidings of Prophethood, it was to a Christian scholar well versed in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, Warqah Bin Naufal, that the Prophet went for advice and he acknowledged him as a Prophet.

During the Makkan period of Islam, the Prophet designated Jerusalem, a holy city for Jews and Christians alike, as the first "*Qibla*" in the direction of which Muslims were commanded to turn at the time of their prayer. (After some years of his stay in Madina, the *Qibla* was changed to the Ka'aba in Makkah).

The Quran, as revealed to the Prophet through the angel Gabriel, contained many elements common to the Bible and the Book of Moses.

In the 9th year of the Islamic Hijra era, the Prophet called upon the Christians of Najran near Makkah to join the fold of Islam. The Prophet received a 60-member delegation of the Najran Christians who wanted to discuss with him the basic tenets of Islam. When the time came for them to pray, they sought the Prophet's permission to say their prayers in the

Prophet's mosque in Madina. Some of the Prophet's companions objected, but the Prophet allowed them to say their prayers because they were "people of the Book". He explained to them at length the Quranic invitation to the "People of the Book" to join hands with the Muslims in the common resolve that they will worship only one God and obey His commands because He is omnipotent and has no equal.

The Prophet and the Islamic State in Madina maintained very cordial and friendly relations with the Christian-ruled African State of Abyssinia. The Prophet held its Christian ruler, the Negus, in high esteem and prayed for the peace of his soul when he heard the sad news of his death. The Prophet had conveyed to the Negus his deep gratitude for having given asylum to the Muslim emigrees from Makkah in the early years of Islam.

The Prophet permitted Muslims to marry Christian and Jewish women without converting them to Islam because they were "People of the Book", i.e. believers in the holy scriptures revealed by God-sent Prophets.

In line with what was revealed in the Quran, the Prophet of Islam devoutly believed that Jesus was a God-sent Prophet and that his mother, Mary, was a virgin when she conceived and gave birth to Jesus. In his letter to Muqawquis, the Christian Coptic ruler of Egypt, inviting him to join the fold of Islam, the Prophet said that if a true Christian believed in the Prophethood of Jesus, he should also have faith in Muhammad as a Prophet of God.

There were sizeable settlements of Christians in Yemen

and Najran in the southern parts of Arabia. They also lived in good numbers in the northern part of the Peninsula. The tribes of Bakr, Taghlib and Tamim followed Christianity. In the north, the tribes of Banu Tayyix and Dumat-al-Jandal were largely Christian. Some colonies of Christians were scattered in other parts of Arabia. Makkah also had a few well-known Christian families such as those of Warqah bin Naufal, Abdullah bin Josh, Othman bin al-Hwayrith and Ummayah bin Al-Salt. Three large Christian States were Arabia's neighbours: in the north was the Byzantine Empire, in the north-west was Egypt and in the south-west was Abyssinia. Nevertheless, Christianity was not a major force in Arabia and the Bedouin Arabs remained largely unaffected by its message. In Makkah itself, the small Christian community had no conspicious role in civic life. In Madina, there were very few Christians but as the Islamic State expanded, the Prophet's contact with the Christians and the Jews in other parts of Arabia increased considerably. As Islam spread, some conflict with the Christians and the Jews in Arabia was inevitable. They did not acknowledge Prophet Muhammad as a Prophet of God and some Jews intrigued at times with the forces hostile to Islam to destroy the nascent Islamic state in Madina. But the Prophet's attitude towards them was one of tolerance and friendliness and he appealed to them to join hands with Muslims in serving God and propagating His message.

His appeal to the Christians was to join with Muslims in embracing the word of God common to both so that they may serve none but the Almighty God. By and large, the Prophet showed immense consideration and accommodation to the Christians. In 614 C.E. when the Christian legions of Rome were defeated by the fire-

worshipping Persians, the Prophet's sympathies wer with the Romans because they were "People of the Book". The Prophet predicted that the Romans would be the victors in a few years and, indeed, this is what happened in 624 C.E. when the Persians were routed in battle by the Roman Christian forces.

The Muslim troops from Madina fought the battle of Mutah against the Christian Byzantine forces only in self-defence.

In the campaign of Tabuk, there was no fighting against the Christians. When the Prophet sent an invitation to the Byzantine Emperor, to embrace Islam, he responded with courtesy and the Prophet appreciated it.

The Prophet's excellent relationship with the Christian community in Najran showed his farsightedness and his respect for Jesus and his followers. In fact, the relationship which the Prophet established between the Islamic State of Madina and the Christian community in Najran was an excellent model of mutual tolerance, cordial co-existence and non-interference in each other's religious and internal affairs. This model was followed by the four Caliphs who came after the Prophet.

The chronicles of that age show that Heraclius, who headed the Eastern Roman Empire called Byzantium, was in his heart convinced that Muhammad was a Prophet of God but he dared not say it openly for the fear that the Roman Christians would kill him. Prophet Muhammad had invited Emperor Heraclius to enter the fold of Islam. The Negus of Abbysinia, it is reported, also acknowledged Muhammad's

divine Prophethood and joined the fold of Islam.

A distinguished addition to the Islamic fraternity was a prominent Christian Chief of the Tai tribe, Iddi, son of the generous Hatim Tai. His sister was taken captive by the Muslim forces and produced before the Prophet. He treated her with great respect and sent her back to her family. She advised her brother, Iddi, to go to Madina and meet the Prophet which he did. He was so impressed by his simple life and his noble-minded words of praise for God that he embraced Islam.

In the Treaty which the Prophet concluded with the Christians of Najran, one of the provisions was that they would, in time of need, lend to the Islamic State of Madina 30 horses, 30 camels and 30 pieces of arms and the Prophet gave the guarantee of the safe return of these loaned items. They were also required to give 2,000 pieces of clothing to the Muslim community in Madina, and in return their churches would be secure, their ecclesiastical order would be respected and no one would be allowed to subvert their faith in their religion. He, however, asked them to give up usary.

When a delegation from the Christian state of Abyssinia was sent to Medina by the Negus, the Prophet played host to them in his own home. Some of his companions offered to extend to the Abyssinian guests their hospitality but the Prophet said this would be his privilege because the Negus had looked after his Makkan followers when they sought refuge in his kingdom.

The Prophet respected Jesus as a Prophet of God but he did not believe that Jesus was the son of God or God himself.

He insisted that there is but one God who alone should be worshipped. The Prophet considered the Bible a God-revealed book but he was of the view that men had later on made some changes in this divine book. He urged Muslims to be tolerant towards the Christians and to have amicable social relations with them.

The example of peaceful and amicable co-existence between the Muslims and the Christians set by the Prophet in the Islamic State in Arabia 1400 years ago should be the basis of a new understanding and rapport between them in the 20th Century. The hangover from the four centuries of the Crusades should be consigned to the limbo of the past. It is unfortunate that the Christian West had to inflict the prolonged trauma of the Crusades on the Muslim East in the Middle Ages. The time has now come when mutual concord and harmony should be the goal of the followers of Islam and Christianity. If the enemies of the Second World War can become the best of friends and allies, there is no reason why Christians and Muslims should not be good friends in a spirit of mutual tolerance, fellowship and devotion to God and opposition to atheistic forces.

Islam and the Challenges of the Future

As the world of Islam enters the :threeshold of the 15th century of the Islamic era, it has every reason to look to the future with robust faith and confidence. After a slumber of nearly two hundred years, the global Islamic community is again on the march. From the shores of the Atlantic to the distant islands of the Pacific, Islam's lighthouses shine forth with greater glow. Some Ten hundred million Muslims – almost a quarter of mankind – now carry with a sense of pride the distinctive badge of their Islamic identity. Islam's eternal message of peace and brotherhood on earth echoes in all the continents of the globe. All the hues of the human race – black, brown, yellow and white – mingle beautifully in the divinely-blessed fraternity of Islam. Resurgent Islam shows a new dynamism and self-confidence in responding to the challenges from its foes. The more than two score independent Islamic States, united in the fold of the Jeddah-based Islamic Conference, have become a force in world affairs. God's bounty has invested the world of Islam with the sinews of economic power whose judicious and far-sighted use can change the fate and fortune of the entire Muslim community on earth. The best brains and the finest scholarship in the Islamic World are being mobilised to re-discover the pristine excellence of Islam, the eternal validity of its postulates and precepts and the cures it has prescribed for treating the afflictions of mankind. The many cobwebs of lies and distortions which Islam's enemies had woven over

the centuries to blur its beneficent image, are being torn apart. More people outside the fold of Islam now know about the universal message of Islam and the virtues of its teachings than ever before. Hundreds of millions of Muslims are reinforcing the foundations of their faith in Islam by learning anew the religious, ethical and legal codes it has gifted to mankind. How very true is the verdict of the famous British historian, Arnold Toynbee, that in the contemporary world, "there is a crying need for the propagation of Islamic virtues".

The history of the past fourteen centuries of Islam bears testimony to the fact that Islam's dynamism and its resilience have been its powerful shields both in the glorious era of its triumphs and the lean years of adversity. It was the dynamic quality of Islam and the ballast of divine support which enabled it to burst forth from its matrix of Arabia with lightning speed and surge across three continents in the short span of sixty years. In its massive sweep through most of the then inhabited world, Islam clashed with the most powerful religions and empires of that age and won the laurels of victory. But most of its conquests endured the wear and tear of time and the vicissitudes of history because they were not merely acquisitions of land but an everlasting conquest of the minds and hearts of the vast millions who came under its sway. Islam was spread more by the moral force of persuasion and the nobility of the conduct of those who propagated it than by the cut and thrust of the sword or the fiat of the ruler. This gave Islam an astonishing ability to survive and spread even in the hostile environment. During the heyday of European colonialism, the Christian West spared no opportunity to smother Islam in the many Muslim empires it seized in Asia and Africa. Islam's exemplary

quality of resilience came to its rescue and the blandishments, subversion and coercion used by the European Christian rulers to wean Muslims away from Islam had no significant effect. Even in the 20th century, the forces of secularism and godless creeds have failed to subvert the faith of Muslims in their great religion. In many Communist countries where the followers of other religions have turned atheists, the votaries of Islam have, by and large, remained steadfast in their allegiance to the Almighty God. In fact, Islam has gained fresh strength while facing the onslaughts and challenges of materialistic ideologies. The epic struggle of the Arab Palestinians against Zionist imperialism and the heroic resistance of the Afghan Muslims to the godless Soviet invaders are contemporary examples of Islam's imperishable power and resilience.

The advocates of materialism and the devotees of science and technology often question the validity of Islamic precepts in the space age. What they ignore is the fact that Islam lays utmost emphasis on the acquiring of knowledge and learning. Go to the farthest corners of the globe in quest of knowledge was Islam's injunction to its followers. When Europe was enshrouded in the Dark Ages, the light of knowledge radiated from the countless seats of learning and research in the world of Islam. The outstanding achievements of Muslim scholars and scientists in the Middle Ages in medicine, mathematics, astronomy, navigation, architecture, philosophy, history, economics and many other arts and sciences are the eternal gifts of Islam to modern civilisation. Even during the Crusades which the Christian West inflicted on the Muslim East, the fruits and blessings of Muslim scholarship and research flowed to Europe, paving the way for European Renaissance. Sultan

Salahuddin Ayubi (1137-1193 C.E.) – Saladin to the West – who defended Islam in the Third Crusade, gifted to the German Emperor, Frederick the Second, one of the many master-pieces of the brilliant Muslim scientists who adorned his court. It was a giant orrery showing the movements of the sun, the moon and the planets. This priceless key to the mysteries of the universe enabled Europe's latter day scientists to unravel celestial secrets and develop theories and mechanisms in navigation and astronomy that eventually led to man's flight to the starry world of the Heavens and the dawn of the Space Age. There is no doubt that the Muslim pioneers in what is now the science of space drew inspiration from the Qur'anic observation that God had endowed man with the latent power to conquer the universe. Modern medicine is permanently indebted to that celebrated Eleventh Century physician and philosopher, Ibn-e-Sina or Avicenna to the West. Four centuries before Adam Smith wrote the Wealth of Nations, a great Muslim historian and economist, Ibn-e-Khaldun, enriched the science of economics with a masterly treatise. The travelogues of the famous Muslim historian and globe-trotter, Ibn-e-Batuta, rank amongst the great travel books of the Middle Ages and furnish models of the excellent contributions of Muslims to the study of social history and anthropology in three populous continents. Therefore, by all tokens and the testament of history, Islam is undeniably a promoter of knowledge and research in the arts and sciences. It is heartening that the Islamic tradition of learning is now being revived with enthusiasm in the world of Islam and centres of knowledge and research are mushrooming in many Muslim countries. The Islamic world now has the wealth, the resources and the will to catch up with the West in the field of science and technology and this it must do

within the shortest span of time. A commendable goal should be the wiping out of the blight of illiteracy from the world of Islam during the current decade. This proposition ought to engage the attention of all the ruling leaders of the Islamic World.

Islam's high moral and ethical values contributed immensely to the spread of Islam in the world. The Prophet practised these norms of morality and ethics in his daily life and in conducting the affairs of the world's first Islamic State which he founded in Madina fourteen centuries ago. The four Caliphs who succeeded him were also models of noble conduct and behaviour. As a practical religion, Islam expects its followers to practise what they believe in. This is, indeed, the eternal spirit of Islam. The lacuna of default in the conduct of the Muslim will not endear him nor his religion to the non-Muslims. This is the rarionale for the movement in many Muslim communities for a return to the Islamic way of life taught and practised by the Prophet. An unfaltering faith in the omnipresence of Allah, a truthful and upright character, flawless honesty, a sense of justice, a feeling of brotherhood for other Muslims, the virtues of mercy and compassion and a simple life style were essential and prominent elements in the Islamic way of life propagated by the Prophet.

Those whose privilege it is to be the rulers in the Islamic World can draw inspiration from the many-splendoured personality of the Prophet. Mercy was one of his adorable traits. As the spiritual and temporal head of the Islamic State he established in Madina, he was more powerful than the Pope and Caesar rolled into one. Yet in the exercise of the vast powers vested in him by God, the Prophet

showed the utmost moderation, patience, justice and mercy. In all the battles he fought so valiantly in defence of Islam, he never shed human blood. He even pardoned those who conspired to kill him. The Prophet's angelic conduct is, indeed, the Muslim model for all mankind to emulate in facing the challenges of the future. The beacons of high-minded conduct lit by the Prophet and his four Caliphs should be the guiding lights for the leaders of the Islamic World.

The solidarity of the Islamic States can be the most reliable shield of protection for them against the perils to which they are exposed. In the forum of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers and the specialised agencies it has created over the past 15 years, the Islamic countries can work together for their mutual good, for the advancement of Islam and for the wellbeing of the global Islamic community. It is highly encouraging that this awareness is growing rapidly amongst the Islamic countrties, paving the way for the eventual establishment of a wellknit Commonwealth of Islam. Pakistan has played a conspicuous role in promoting this awareness and its sustained efforts to establish an Islamic Order in the country are encouraging other Muslims countries to follow suit.

The message of Islam is for all mankind. It is a universal religion. Its call transcends the barriers of race, colour, tongue and clime. The Prophet, in his last sermon at Makkah, had outlawed for all time racial discrimination. In the fold of Islam, he preached, the Arab and the non-Arab and Black and White are equal. This noble concept of universal brotherhood under the umbrella of Islam makes Islam the ideal religion of the future for entire humanity. A

British historian, Philip Gibbs, subscribed to this view when he wrote that Islam had done more for "the progress of civilization and morality than any other faith which has animated the souls of men since the beginning of creation". Arnold Toynbee, in his ten-volume masterpiece, *A study of history,* diagnosed that in the tussle between the Western and the Russian Communist ways of life for the allegiance of mankind, the Islamic tradition of the brotherhood of man would seem to be a better ideal for meeting the social needs of the times. In the eyes of Islam, the health of the human body is as important as the health of the human soul. Islam's dynamism and time-tested resilience, the simplicity of its beliefs and facility of direct communion between the believer and his Creator have invested this great religion with the power to minister to mankind's spiritual as well as physical needs and the ability to meet the challenges of the future. As a religion of peace on earth, Islam is by far the finest instrument available to man to integrate world society into a single World State, thus putting an end to the perils posed to mankind's future by "the anarchy of European nationalism and the regimentation of Russian communism". The spread of Islam in North America, Britain and Continental Europe during the current century and the recent proliferation of Islamic literature in all parts of the globe are indicators of the renewed strength of this missionary and universalist religion. Muslims are no longer the captives of a past most of whose glories are entombed in the vaults of history; their sights are now trained at the future. A new and powerful urge has gripped their minds and souls that they should endeavour to accomplish in the service of Islam what would match the glorious achievements of their forefathers. And in seeking to do so, they invoke the blessings of God for all of mankind. Their vision of the future is bright and radiant – a

righteous international community sharing in peace, harmony and concord the bounty of God on earth.

The Holy Prophet's Pilgrimage at Makkah

The sermon of the Holy Prophet on the occasion of his last pilgrimage at Makkah in the tenth year of the Hijra, the Islamic calendar, is a masterpiece of eloquence and divinely-inspired statemanship. He portrayed in it the universal character of Islam, the global sweep of its heavenly message and its stress on the brotherhood of all Muslims, irrespective of their colour, tongue and clime.

Indeed, the sermon marks a turning point in the history of Islam. Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) gave his devoted followers a new sense of direction for spreading the gospel of Allah to the farthest corners of the globe. The world's first Islamic state was firmly established in the Arabian peninsula with its seat of power in Madina. The Prophet was its founder, ruling head and sovereign, but without the regalia of kings and the pomp of power. The recalcitrant city of Makkah, his birthplace, was humbled by the legions of Islam and most of its inhabitants had become Muslims.

The Prophet had a premonition in the tenth year of the Hijra that the summons from the Heavens were awaiting him and that in the following year he would have a date with his Maker. He was, therefore, anxious to make what he expected could be his last pilgrimate at Makkah on the occasion of the religious ceremony of *Hajj*.

Word had gone out from Madina that the Prophet would be in Makkah for pilgrimage. Muslims from all parts of Arabia and some from distant lands flocked to Makkah in tens of thousands for pilgrimage and also for having a glimpse of the man they adored as the Prophet of God. More than 100,000 Muslims were gathered in Makkah when the Prophet rode into the holy city from Madina. Assembled along with him were his close associates from Madina and the Muslim neophytes of Makkah.

Having performed the religious rites, in the precincts of the *Ka'bah* and made the sacrificial offering of camels to God Almighty, the Prophet met multitudes of Islam's devotees. Before a massive congregation of Muslims in the sun-bathed valley ringed by low hills in Makkah, the Prophet said in his sermon:

"No Arab is superior to a non-Arab and no non-Arab is superior to an Arab; "No dark-skinned person is superior to a white person and no white person is superior to a dark-skinned person;

"The criteria of honour in the estimation of God Almighty is the individual's righteousness and a honest living."

Enshrined in the Prophet's sermon are noble concepts whose validity has not eroded with the passage of fourteen centuries. He impressed upon his followers that all Muslims are like brothers and are equal once they join the great brotherhood of Islam. The honour and goodness of a Muslim, he ruled, should be measured by a yardstick of piety and righteous conduct and not on the basis of worldly riches.

Some of the other injunctions of the Prophet in the course of his utterances before his followers on the occasion of his

last pilgrimage at Makkah are:

* Don't shed the blood of an innocent person; don't resort to unlawful, immoral methods to make money and don't grab another person's possession:
* All evils which flourished before the advent of Islam are crushed under my feet; all blood feuds must end; all usurious demands are made void and unlawful.
* Be fair to women; respect their rights and do them no injustice;
* I am leaving you a permanent guide – the Book of Allah. If you follow it devotedly, you will never go off the righteous path.

The precincts of the *Ka'bah* resounded with the Prophet's loud affirmation: "God is great." He skirted the celestial black stone which Makkans had worshipped for centuries before the light of Islam illuminated the darkness of their souls. He strode atop the hillock of *Safa* and said aloud:

"None but Allah should be worshipped; he is the Master of all the worlds; he has no peer; he reigns and rules over the entire universe; all praise and all glory be to Him."

The Prophet indicated to his followers that it might not be his privilege to perform the pilgrimage at Makkah in the years to come (because of his premonition that death would claim him). He appealed to Muslims to follow the Qur'anic injunctions in letter and spirit, to offer prayers regularly and to fast during the holy month of *Ramadan*. He made a clarion call for maintaining unity in the fold of Islam. He urged the votaries of Islam to perform the annual *Hajj* at Makkah and to lead righteous lives.

The Prophet's sermon on the occasion of his last

pilgrimage at Makkah was a testament of love and brotherhood; it demonstrated the indisputable fact that Islam is a Universal Religion, that it knows no barriers of colour, geography and language, that Islamic society is essentially egalitarian and that the adherence of Muslims to Islamic teachings is the key to their well-being. By preaching the brotherhood of all races, colours and nations within the fold of Islam, the Prophet showed to mankind the pathway to global peace and amity. The message of Islam is thus for the entire human race – universal and eternal.

The Prophet Muhammad's (p.b.u.h.) Last Sermon

This Sermon was delivered on the Ninth Day of Dhul Hijjah 10 A.H. in the 'Uranah valley of Mount Arafat

"O People, lend me an attentive ear, for I know not whether, after this year, I shall ever be amongst you again. Therefore listen to what I am saying to you very carefully and TAKE THESE WORDS TO THOSE WHO COULD NOT BE PRESENT HERE TODAY.

O People, just as you regard this month, this day, this city as Sacred, so regard the life and property of every Muslim as a sacred trust. Return the goods entrusted to you to their rightful owners. Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you. Remember that you will indeed meet your LORD, and that HE will indeed reckon your deeds. ALLAH has forbidden you to take usury (Interest), therefore all Interest obligation shall henceforth be waived. . .

Beware of Satan, for the safety of your religion. He has lost all hope that he will ever be able to lead you astray in big things, so beware of following him in small things.

O People, it is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women, but they also have rights over you. If they abide by your right then to them belongs the right to be fed and clothed in kindness. Do treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers. And it is your right that they do not make friends with any one of whom you do not approve, as well as never to commit adultery.

O People, listen to me in earnest, worship ALLAH, say your five daily prayers (Salah), fast during the month of Ramadan, and give your wealth in Zakat. Perform Hajj if you can afford to. You know that every Muslim is the brother of another Muslim. You are all equal. Nobody has superiority over other except by piety and good action.

Remember, one day you will appear before ALLAH and answer for your deeds. So beware, do not stray from the path of righteousness after I am gone.

O People, NO PROPHET OR APOSTLE WILL COME AFTER ME AND NO NEW FAITH WILL BE BORN. Reason well, therefore, O People, and understand my words which I convey to you. I leave behind me two things, the QUR'AN and my example the SUNNAH and if you follow these you will never go astray.

All those who listen to me shall pass on my words to others and those to others again; and may the last ones understand my words better than those who listen to me directly. Be my witness O ALLAH, that I have conveyed your message to your people."

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All those who listen to me shall pass on my words to others and those to others again; and may the last ones understand my words better than those who listen to me directly. Be my witness O ALLAH, that I have conveyed your message to your people."

About the Author

Mr. Qutubuddin Aziz served as a Minister at the Embassy of Pakistan in London from January 1978 to mid-1979 and again from December 1980 to February 1986. During his diplomatic assignment, he travelled extensively all over the U.K. and lectured at Universities, Colleges, learned bodies, Mosques, Pakistani Associations and many organisations of Muslims. This book is based on the reconstruction of his mostly extempore lectures on the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and also his published articles on Islam.

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